

NATO AWACS Surveillance Aircraft Support to the Counter ISIS Coalition



AIM: Responding to the threat posed by ISIS, NATO has deployed AWACS surveillance aircraft to support the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. NATO’s advanced Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft are helping to make the skies safer by providing greater situational awareness, and thereby boosting and enhancing the Coalition’s overall “air picture.” Operating from Konya airfield in Turkey, NATO’s AWACS aircraft have been supporting the Coalition with air surveillance and situational awareness since October 2016. Following a decision by NATO Heads of State and Government in May 2017, the AWACS will also conduct airspace management for the Coalition.

The coordination of airstrikes is not part of the mandate. AWACS only fly in international airspace or over Turkey. AWACS are capable of detecting aircraft hundreds of kilometers away, meaning that they can monitor Iraqi and Syrian airspace from inside Turkish airspace. NATO’s deployment of AWACS aircraft is

a tangible contribution to the Counter-ISIS effort and a signal of NATO’s determination to help fight terrorism. By providing AWACS support, NATO is demonstrating its resolve to tackle security challenges coming from the Middle East and North Africa.

AWACS - Airborne Warning and Control System Aircraft

NATO operates a fleet of 14 AWACS surveillance aircraft. They are the only major military assets directly owned by NATO; other assets are provided by Allies on an operation-by-operation basis. Derived from the Boeing 707 aircraft, AWACS planes can provide air surveillance, command and control, battle space management and communications. Using a radar dish mounted on top of the airplane, AWACS planes have the ability to detect aircraft and ships at great distance. NATO’s AWACS are based at the NATO Airbase Geilenkirchen in Germany, with forward operating airfields in Greece (Aktion), Italy (Trapani), Norway (Ørland), and Turkey (Konya). AWACS crews are drawn from 15 different NATO member countries. AWACS have played an important role in NATO operations and missions for more than three decades, including in Afghanistan, Libya and the Balkans. NATO AWACS planes began reconnaissance flights over Eastern Europe in March 2014, in response to Russia’s illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea.

General Characteristics

AIRFRAME: Boeing 707

CREW: Around 15. Numbers vary depending on specific operational requirements.

OPERATING ALTITUDE: Around 10km.

RADAR COVERAGE: An AWACS plane flying at 10km altitude has over 312,000 km² in its field of view. AWACS can detect low flying targets within 400km and medium altitude targets within 520 km.

RANGE: AWACS have an unrefueled range of around 6,000 km – or eight to ten hours of flying.

PARTICIPATING ALLIES: 17 Allies contribute to the AWACS programme, 16 Allies provide aircrews.



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